

Idaho Energy Buzz – May 2006

Wise Driving Habits Will Help You Ease The Pain At The Pump

By Linda Cawley, IDWR Information Specialist

With regular unleaded gasoline hovering around \$2.55 a gallon throughout Idaho, many of us are feeling the pinch when we fill our tanks. And with summer traveling season just around the corner, it's time to take some drastic measures to reduce our consumption.

Some of the obvious measures include driving sensibly, observing the speed limit and avoiding excessive idling. Aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration and braking) wastes gas. It can lower your gas mileage by 33 percent at highway speeds and by 5 percent around town, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Since most Interstate highways allow speed limits up to 75 miles per hour, it may be risky to drive much slower. However, if you're traveling roads that allow slower speeds, take advantage of the situation. While each vehicle reaches its optimal fuel economy at a different speed, gas mileage usually decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 mph. A 10-mile-per-hour decrease in your speed can give you a 15-20 percent increase in fuel economy, according to the AAA.

Whether you have to wait in your car for 5 minutes or 15 minutes, allowing your car to idle gets zero miles per gallon. The larger your vehicle, of course, the more fuel you're wasting. Except for traffic lights, turn off your engine when you have to wait for more than a minute.

Depending on the weather, you may not need to run your air conditioner, especially if you're driving at lower speeds. Cars are more aerodynamic, so it's pretty much a toss up whether you use the air conditioner or open the windows, you'll use about the same amount of fuel. But make a sensible choice – don't drive with the windows down and the air conditioner on.

Watch the extra weight your car carries, especially if you drive a smaller car. An extra 100 pounds in your vehicle could reduce your MPG by up to 2

percent, depending on the size of your car. It isn't going to hurt to carry your golf clubs in the trunk, but get rid of unnecessary weight, like luggage or ski racks.

One of the biggest culprits for wasting fuel is jackrabbit starts – those frequent accelerations and stops. People who make quick starts and stops burn up to 37 percent more fuel than those who coast between lights. So ease up on the pedal and take advantage of your cruise control when driving on the highway.

Of course, keep your engine properly tuned and check and replace your air filters regularly. A well-tuned engine can improve your gas mileage by an average of 4 percent, while replacing a clogged air filter can improve your mileage by as much as 10 percent, according to DOE.

You can improve your gas mileage by about 3 percent by keeping your tires inflated to the proper pressure. Under-inflated tires can lower gas mileage by 0.4 percent for every 1-psi drop in pressure of all four tires. Properly inflated tires are also safer and last longer.

Last but not least, plan your trips ahead of time, even if you're just doing errands around town. Make a list of the places you need to go and work out a route before you leave the house. You'll save time as well as gas.